

ORIGINAL

PHS

WORKING WITH PERSONS WITH AIDS

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(GREETINGS TO HOSTS, GUESTS, FRIENDS, ETC.)

EACH YEAR AT ABOUT THIS TIME, THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE -- AND, WE WOULD HOPE, THE NATION AT LARGE -- HEIGHTENS OUR AWARENESS AND SENSITIVITY IN REGARD TO THOSE OF OUR RELATIVES, FRIENDS, AND CO-WORKERS WHO ARE HANDICAPPED.

AND I AM PROUD TO SAY THAT THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE HAS HAD ONE OF THE BEST RECORDS IN GOVERNMENT, WHEN IT COMES TO RAISING THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF ITS OWN PEOPLE TO THE EXISTENCE OF HANDICAPS AND THE NEED TO BRING HANDICAPPED EMPLOYEES INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF AMERICAN LIFE ... AND INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF P.H.S. IN PARTICULAR.

AND THAT'S WHAT I WANT TO TALK ABOUT THIS MORNING.

AS ALL OF YOU KNOW, I'M SURE, MY TRAVEL SCHEDULE FOR THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS HAS BEEN PACKED WITH TRIPS AROUND THIS COUNTRY AND AROUND THE WORLD, AND MOST OF THE TIME I'M OUT SPEAKING TO GROUPS ABOUT THE CHALLENGES PRESENTED TO THEM BY THE DISEASE OF AIDS.

SOME OF THE GROUPS ARE HEALTH-RELATED ... AND SOME AREN'T. BUT IT REALLY DOESN'T MATTER BECAUSE MY MESSAGE IS THE SAME WHEREVER I GO. AND THIS IS IT:

AIDS IS NOT JUST A DISEASE AFFECTING THE BODIES AND MINDS OF A FEW THOUSAND PEOPLE. IF YOU LOOK AT NUMBERS ALONE, YOU'LL MISS THE REAL STORY OF THIS DISEASE, FOR AIDS HAS BURROWED ITS WAY INTO THE FABRIC OF AMERICAN LIFE. UNLESS WE RECOGNIZE THE EXTENSIVE AND PERMANENT DAMAGE IT CAN DO THERE, WE'RE GOING TO CAN LOSE MORE THAN HUMAN LIVES. WE'LL LOSE THE MORAL AND ETHICAL STRENGTH THAT HAS KEPT OUR NATION TOGETHER FOR OVER 200 YEARS.

I'M NOT READY TO RUN THAT KIND OF RISK. AND I DON'T BELIEVE YOU ARE EITHER.

AS CITIZENS AND AS MEMBERS OF THE WORLD'S MOST EFFECTIVE AND PROGRESSIVE ORGANIZATION OF HEALTH WORKERS, OUR JOB IN THE FACE OF THIS EPIDEMIC IS TWO-FOLD: WE'VE GOT TO DO WHATEVER WE CAN TO SAVE THOSE INDIVIDUAL HUMAN LIVES THAT ARE AT RISK OF AIDS -- AND THAT MEANS EDUCATION AND PREVENTION -- AND WE'VE GOT TO SAVE OUR SENSE OF NATIONAL UNITY AND PURPOSE, WHICH ARE ALSO AT RISK.

AM I OVER-STATING THE CASE? NO, I AM NOT. AND LET ME TELL YOU WHY.

I'M GOING TO BEGIN THIS BRIEF PART OF MY REMARKS WITH A QUICK REVIEW OF THE BASIC ASPECTS OF THIS DISEASE SO WE'RE ALL OPERATING WITH THE SAME INFORMATION. IT'S IMPORTANT TO DO THAT BECAUSE -- EVEN HERE IN THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE ITSELF -- I'M POSITIVE THERE ARE STILL MANY PEOPLE WHO ARE STILL UNCLEAR ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE DISEASE OF AIDS.

FIRST OF ALL, WE KNOW A FEW THINGS ABOUT AIDS, BUT WE DON'T KNOW ENOUGH TO PRODUCE A VACCINE TO PREVENT ITS SPREAD OR A DRUG TO STOP IT IN ITS TRACKS.

SECONDLY, AIDS IS FATAL. IN FACT, IT SEEMS TO HAVE ONE OF THE HIGHEST FATALITY RATES OF ANY INFECTIOUS DISEASE WE'VE EVER COME ACROSS, HERE OR ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD.

AND THREE, THE AIDS VIRUS IS TRANSMITTED BY CERTAIN BEHAVIORS THAT MOST PEOPLE DON'T ENGAGE IN OR APPROVE OF: ANAL INTERCOURSE, FOR EXAMPLE, AND THE SHARING OF NEEDLES BY DRUG ADDICTS.

THESE THREE KEY ASPECTS OF THE DISEASE MAKE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE VERY EDGY ABOUT AIDS. AND THAT'S CERTAINLY UNDERSTANDABLE.

BUT LET'S KEEP OUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT. NO ONE IS ASKING YOU TO COMPROMISE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT THE KINDS OF BEHAVIOR THAT MAKES AIDS POSSIBLE. THAT'S NOT A PRIORITY OF ANY KIND. AND FOR THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE, IT NEVER HAS BEEN A PRIORITY.

NO, OUR FIRST PRIORITY IS TO FIGHT THE DISEASE ... NOT THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE IT. THAT'S BEEN OUR PRIORITY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST SMALLPOX AND SYPHILIS AND TYPHOID AND ALCOHOLISM AND A HUNDRED OTHER CONDITIONS THAT MAY OR MAY NOT REFLECT HIGH-RISK PERSONAL BEHAVIOR.

AND THAT MUST BE OUR FIRST PRIORITY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST AIDS, ALSO.

OUR SECOND PRIORITY IS TO EDUCATE EVERYONE ABOUT THE DISEASE SO THAT IT WILL NOT BE SPREAD. AND THE FIRST PERSON WE NEED TO EDUCATE IS OURSELF.

AGAIN, I'M VERY PROUD OF THE JOB BEING DONE BY ALL P.H.S. ORGANIZATIONS IN GETTING THE FACTS ABOUT AIDS TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

BUT I'M HERE THIS MORNING TO MAKE SURE THAT WE, TOO, HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THAT VERY SAME INFORMATION, BECAUSE WE, TOO, NEED TO KNOW HOW TO AVOID THE PHYSICAL DISEASE OF AIDS.

BUT WE ALSO NEED TO UNDERSTAND HOW TO AVOID THE EFFECTS OF THAT DISEASE UPON OUR INSTINCTS AS COMPASSIONATE AND FAIR-MINDED CITIZENS.

NO AMERICAN SHOULD CONSIDER HIMSELF OR HERSELF FREE TO USE THE FEAR OF AIDS AS A SHIELD BEHIND WHICH TO VIOLATE THE ETHICS OF MEDICINE ... OR ANY OTHER PROFESSION ... OR THE ACCEPTED ETHICS OF THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE.

WE'VE SENT THAT EXPLICIT MESSAGE TO SCHOOL OFFICIALS WHO HAVE BARRED CHILDREN WITH AIDS FROM PUBLIC CLASSROOMS, AND WE TOLD THEM THEY WERE WRONG TO DO THAT.

WE'VE SENT THAT MESSAGE TO PHYSICIANS AND HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATORS WHO'VE TURNED AWAY PATIENTS WITH AIDS OR WHO TESTED SEROPOSITIVE, AND WE'VE TOLD THEM THEY WERE WRONG TO DO THAT.

AND WE'VE SENT THAT MESSAGE TO EMPLOYERS WHO SUMMARILY DISMISS ANY WORKER WHO IS SEROPOSITIVE OR WHO SHOWS THE FIRST CLINICAL SIGNS OF AN AIDS-RELATED COMPLEX. AND WE'VE TOLD THEM THEY WERE WRONG TO DO THAT.

TODAY, I WANT TO BE SURE WE IN THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE HAVE ALSO GOT THE MESSAGE. WE ARE HEALTH PROFESSIONALS SERVING OTHERS. BUT WE'RE ALSO EMPLOYEES AND FELLOW WORKERS. AND THIS MESSAGE WE'VE BEEN SENDING EVERYONE ELSE IS A MESSAGE WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND, ALSO.

WHY NOW? WHY AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME, DURING THE ANNUAL "HANDICAP AWARENESS" PROGRAM? BECAUSE THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES, THE PRESIDENT AND THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES, AND THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES HAVE AGREED ON CERTAIN FACTS -- AND THIS IS A PARAPHRASE OF ALL THE POSITIONS, TO BE SURE -- BUT THEY HAVE ALL AGREED ON THE FOLLOWING FACTS:

FIRST, THAT AIDS IS A "HANDICAPPING DISEASE," IN THE SENSE THAT THE TERM IS USED IN BOTH THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS RESTORATION ACT OF 1987. THIS INCLUDES ANY PHYSICAL OR MENTAL IMPAIRMENT WHICH SUBSTANTIALLY LIMITS ONE OR MORE OF A PERSON'S MAJOR LIFE ACTIVITIES.

SECOND, A PERSON MAY BE INFECTED WITH THE HUMAN IMMUNO-DEFICIENCY VIRUS, OR H.I.V., YET SHOW NO CLINICAL SIGNS OR SYMPTOMS AND, IN EVERY OTHER WAY, BE ABLE TO FUNCTION NORMALLY AND ADEQUATELY ON THE JOB.

THIRD, IT IS FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT POLICY, AS WELL AS THE LAW, THAT "HIV-INFECTED EMPLOYEES SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE WORKING AS LONG AS THEY ARE ABLE TO MAINTAIN ACCEPTABLE PERFORMANCE AND DO NOT POSE A SAFETY OR HEALTH THREAT TO THEMSELVES OR OTHERS IN THE WORKPLACE."

AS I INDICATED EARLIER, A PERSON HAS TO KNOWINGLY DO CERTAIN THINGS TO BECOME INFECTED WITH THE AIDS VIRUS. THE TWO MAIN ACTIVITIES ARE SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, ESPECIALLY ANAL INTERCOURSE, AND THE SHARING OF NEEDLES BY DRUG ABUSERS.

NOW, BELIEVE ME, IF THOSE KINDS OF THINGS ARE GOING ON IN THE PARKLAWN BUILDING DURING THE NORMAL WORKDAY ... MY FRIENDS ... AIDS IS THE LEAST OF OUR PROBLEMS.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO PRACTICE ANAL INTERCOURSE OR SHOOT DRUGS TO HAVE AIDS. THROUGH BISEXUAL MEN AND THE SEX PARTNERS OF I.V. DRUG ABUSERS, THE VIRUS IS ALREADY IN THE HETEROSEXUAL POPULATION, WHERE IT IS SPREADING NUMERICALLY AND GEOGRAPHICALLY -- BUT NOT EXPLODING AS IT DID AMONG HOMOSEXUALS.

I DON'T THINK THAT'S THE CASE. BUT I WOULD SAY THAT, IN A WORKFORCE THIS LARGE AND IN AN ORGANIZATION THIS DIVERSE, THE STATISTICAL POSSIBILITIES ARE SUCH THAT WE DO NOW -- OR VERY SOON WILL HAVE -- INDIVIDUALS IN AMONG US WHO ARE SEROPOSITIVE AND VERY POSSIBLY ALSO SHOWING THE FIRST CLINICAL SIGNS OF AN AIDS-RELATED DISEASE.

OUR RESPONSE TO AIDS MUST BE THE SAME RESPONSE THAT WE DEMAND OF THE REST OF THE COUNTRY.

OUR RESPONSE MUST BE COMPASSIONATE AND IT MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH THE LAW OF THE LAND.

AS A PHYSICIAN AND AS YOUR SURGEON GENERAL, I AM PROUD TO BE PART OF A TRADITION OF CARE THAT GOES BACK MORE THAN TWO MILLENNIA ... A TRADITION THAT WILL NOT ABANDON THE SICK AND THE DISABLED, WHOEVER THEY ARE AND WHATEVER THEY MAY HAVE DONE TO HAVE ARRIVED IN SUCH A FIX.

AND THIS IS THE TRADITION OF OUR NATION AND OF OUR OWN PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE. WE HAVE EVERY REASON TO BE PROUD OF THE WAY WE'VE FACED THE CHALLENGE OF FAIRNESS AND HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL, PROVIDING QUALITY CARE TO ALL OUR CITIZENS, REGARDLESS OF RACE, COLOR, CREED, AGE, SEX, NATIONAL ORIGIN ... OR DEGREE OF ABILITY OR DISABILITY.

IT HASN'T BEEN EASY AND IT HASN'T BEEN PERFECT. BUT OUR RECORD IS STILL A MODEL FOR THE REST OF THE WORLD.

NOW THE QUESTION BEFORE IS SIMPLY THIS:

WILL THE DISEASE OF AIDS -- ALL BY ITSELF -- REVERSE THIS
AMERICAN TREND IN HUMAN HISTORY?

WILL THIS DISEASE -- BY ITSELF --RAISE ONCE AGAIN THE
ARTIFICIAL BARRIERS BETWEEN OUR CITIZENS THAT IT TOOK SO
MUCH WORK AND COURAGE TO TEAR DOWN?

WE HOPE AND PRAY THAT IT WILL NOT. BUT HOPES AND PRAYERS
MAY NOT BE ENOUGH. WE NEED TO REINFORCE THOSE HOPES AND PRAYERS
WITH COURAGE AND COMPASSION AT EVERY LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT ... IN
EVERY OFFICE AND LABORATORY ... AND AT EVERY WORK STATION.

AND SO WE MUST ASK IF WE ARE TRULY MATURE ENOUGH TO WAGE A TOTAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE DISEASE OF AIDS?

AND ARE WE SECURE ENOUGH TO OFFER JUSTICE AND FAIR DEALING TO EVERY VICTIM OF THE DISEASE?

THESE QUESTIONS ARE ON THE HORIZON BEFORE US. BUT THE HORIZON IS NOT THAT FAR AWAY.

I HOPE THAT WE -- THE PROUD MEMBERS OF A 200-YEAR-OLD ORGANIZATION DEVOTED TO THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF ALL AMERICANS -- I SINCERELY HOPE THAT WE WILL NOT STUMBLE TOWARD THAT HORIZON AND ARRIVE UNPREPARED FOR THE CHALLENGES THAT LIE BEYOND.

INSTEAD, I HOPE WE WILL MOVE FORWARD WITH GOOD SENSE AND
GOOD SCIENCE AND, TOGETHER, GIVE THE WORLD SOMETHING EVERY BIT AS
PRECIOUS AS THE MUCH-DESIRED AIDS VACCINE:

WE WILL GIVE THE WORLD A GENUINE DEMONSTRATION OF THE POWER
OF COMPASSION AND JUSTICE IN THEIR TRIUMPH OVER A DREAD
DISEASE.

ONCE AGAIN...THANK YOU.

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